



Russia: Preparing Sham Referenda in Occupied Ukrainian Territories

Executive Summary: Moscow probably intends to stage sham referenda on joining Russia in at least some of the Ukrainian territories it currently occupies as early as September 2022. The Kremlin so far has made no public announcement about dates, but it is laying groundwork for the referenda. These preparatory efforts, led by the first deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, Sergey Kiriyenko, are almost certainly aimed at giving a veneer of legitimacy to a fraudulent exercise that will violate the Ukrainian Constitution, the United Nations Charter, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe principles.

Moscow aiming for September date for referenda

We judge that Moscow probably plans to stage referenda on joining Russia in one or more of the occupied Ukrainian territories and would like to do so on or around September 11, the date of Russia's regional elections. We assess that date could be adjusted depending on battlefield dynamics. By synchronizing the referenda with Russian elections, Moscow probably intends to show that it already considers the territories to be part of Russia.

- Though the Kremlin so far has kept silent about dates, a number of Russian officials and proxy authorities in the occupied areas have publicly claimed the referenda will take place in early-to-mid-September.
- Russia has been considering staging referenda in the Russian-occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson Oblasts this summer or fall.
- A Russian proxy authority in occupied Zaporizhzhia Oblast has been telling local residents that a referendum on accession to Russia would be held in September.

Moscow laying groundwork for fraud

Kiriyenko is responsible for overseeing the newly occupied Ukrainian territories and preparing for their incorporation into Russia. Kiriyenko's regular portfolio is domestic policy; his current assignment underscores the Kremlin's view of the occupied areas, and of Ukraine more broadly, as an internal matter.

Kiriyenko and other senior Russian government officials have been visiting the occupied Ukrainian territories, probably to try to convince local populations of the supposed benefits of Russian occupation.

- [REDACTED] Russia is working to replicate its previous experience in staging sham referenda in occupied areas by relying on predetermined numbers to exaggerate voter turnout and the percentage of those who supposedly "voted" in favor of joining Russia. This approach includes a propaganda campaign touting the supposed legitimacy of the "referendum" and celebrating its predetermined results.

- [REDACTED]
Based on Russia's prior actions in Ukraine, we assess that Russian officials and their proxies will falsely claim high voter turnout and high voter support in favor of incorporation into Russia.